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## History and Politics under Gorbachev: Professional Autonomy and Democratization

by Mark von Hagen

Rarely do historians worry about becoming outdated within a matter of months or weeks, but indeed that is the situation of anyone trying to make sense of the exciting developments in Soviet history today. A good deal of world history and early Russian history is undergoing revision, but developments in 19th and 20th century history are the most important because discussions of the late Imperial and Soviet periods are closely linked to projects for restructuring and moral renewal that the Gorbachev leadership and reformist intelligentsia are pursuing. The most volatile issue, of course, is the Stalin question in its broadest sense: the character, origins, and consequences of the Stalin system, the personal role of Stalin, the role of society or social groups, the legacy of Lenin, and the greater debate about socialism and the left in general. Other topics have included the rehabilitation of long-proscribed political leaders and intellectuals, including Bukharin and the victims of the show trials of the 1930s, and even the first timid reassessments of Leon Trotsky; the purges, terror, and concentration camps; the collectivization and famine; the New Economic Policy; non-Russian nationalities; Soviet-East European relations; and the international Communist movement.<sup>1</sup>

At the outset of the period of reevaluation, a good deal of discussion of the past occurred outside traditional forums of professional historical debate. Some of the most delicate and sensational questions have been raised in films, on the stage, on television, in fiction, and in popular journals. No

doubt the most important cultural event until the beginning of 1988 was the release of Tengiz Abuladze's film, *Repentance*, which confronted Soviet society with issues of guilt, silence, and conscience. The appearance of Abuladze's film coincided with the publication of Anatolii Rybakov's novel, *Children of the Arbat*, a semi-autobiographical account of the Stalin era and purges of the Party and military elites. Several plays by Mikhail Shatrov, (including *Forward, Forward, Forward!*, *The Brest Peace*, and *Dictatorship of Conscience*) and Fedor Burlatskii (*Political Testament*) have offered Soviet audiences radically new images of the early Bolshevik leadership, especially portrayals of Bukharin and Trotsky that are more realistic than any since the late 1920s. Several news magazines and journals, but not the journals of the professional historical establishment, took the lead in dramatic revelations about the past, especially *Literaturnaia gazeta*, *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, *Ogonek*, *Moscow News*, *Druzhba narodov*, *Novyi mir*, *Iunost'* and even such unlikely organs of glasnost' as *Nauka i zhizn'*, *Argumenty i fakty*, and *Kommunist*.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, the role played by the political leadership has been crucial to the process of opening up the past, as it was during the last period of reformist activity under Khrushchev. One indicator of the distance travelled since 1956 is that, unlike Khrushchev's "secret speech" to the Twentieth Party Congress, Gorbachev, in his speech on the 70th anniversary of the October Revolution, delivered the address

1 Among the key issues that have played an important symbolic role in reevaluating the past have been the careers of certain political and cultural leaders, especially Nikolai Bukharin, the bitter struggles in science between Trofim Lysenko and Nikolai Vavilov, the agricultural economist Aleksandr Chaianov, and a seemingly endless list of purged and silenced artists and writers: Osip Mandel'shtam, Boris Pasternak, Pavel Antokolskii, Kazimir Malevich, and many others.

2 For more details, see the excellent pieces by R. W. Davies, "Soviet History in the Gorbachev Revolution: The First Phase," *The Socialist Register* (1988): 37-78; Stephen Wheatcroft, "Unleashing the Energy of History, Mentioning the Unmentionable and Reconstructing Soviet Historical Awareness: Moscow 1987," *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies* Vol. 1, No. 1 (1987): 85-132; two articles by Dev Murarka in *The Nation* (October 24; October 31, 1987); and "Glasnost' and Soviet Historians," a special issue of *Soviet Studies in History* Vol. 27, No. 1 (Summer 1988), edited by William B. Husband.





in public and on nationwide television.<sup>3</sup> The General Secretary devoted more than a third of his address to a brief history of the Soviet Union,<sup>4</sup> which Western analysts immediately subjected to their Kremlinological wisdom and pronounced a compromise among the several contending factions that make up the Gorbachev reform coalition. But the very fact that the Party leader felt himself obliged to make a speech about history indicates clearly that interpretations of history occupy a special place in Soviet society and politics and are perceived to be inextricably linked to the current political struggles. The study of history, as well as historians themselves, stand both to benefit and suffer from such exalted attention.

## History, Gorbachev and the Intelligentsia

What were the highlights of Gorbachev's November speech? The General Secretary treated as uncontroversial the fact that the Bolsheviks had not played the leading role in the February Revolution, a break with Stalinist orthodoxy that thirty years earlier had led to the dismissal of the assistant editor of *Problems of History*, Eduard Burdzhakov.<sup>5</sup> Gorbachev devoted considerable attention to the New Economic Policy, which "widened the notion of socialism" in ways that are directly relevant to Gorbachev's own reform agenda. In particular, he focused on Lenin's writings about the food tax (which replaced the policy of food requisitioning of the Civil War years). This "wealth of ideas" revealed the potential of relying on individual initiative and thereby freeing the state to jettison a good part of its cumbersome bureaucracy. Gorbachev also put to rest the claims of many that Stalin knew nothing of the lawlessness that came to be associated with his name. He criticized the Stalin leadership's collectivization drive as a departure from Lenin's policy because techniques of "command and centralization were not suitable for rural life." As a consequence of this mistaken policy decision, the administrative-command system that emerged to implement collectivization and industrialization spread to the superstructure and restricted the democratic potential of socialism, creating an atmosphere of intolerance, hostility and suspicion. Gorbachev announced that the October 1987 Central Committee Plenary meeting had voted to resume the rehabilitation process for Stalin's victims and that a special commission of the Central Committee would write a new Party History. Turning to World War II, or the Great Patriotic War, Gorbachev gave the lion's share of the praise to the commanders, followed by Stalin, but he reminded his lis-

teners that the brunt of the war was borne by the Soviet soldier. During the postwar years, the first signs of contradiction appeared between society and the old methods of leadership. In other words, the Stalin system reached a state of crisis in the years immediately preceding Stalin's death. As evidence of the unhealthy situation, Gorbachev cited the Leningrad Case and the Doctor's Plot. In a departure from Brezhnev-era rhetoric, Gorbachev openly praised Nikita Khrushchev for his courage, although the former leader was guilty of "subjectivist errors" and "voluntaristic methods." Turning to his immediate predecessors, Gorbachev gave credit to the Brezhnev leadership for introducing some economic reforms, but he charged them with a shortage of political will that doomed the reforms to failure. Brezhnev, who was mentioned by name (another departure from the past practice of omitting reference to discredited predecessors), was blamed for bringing Soviet society to a new pre-crisis situation. Summing up his review of Soviet history, Gorbachev declared that the current reforms are the most significant changes since the October Revolution, thereby wrapping his policy initiatives in the mantle of 1917.

What about some of the limits of the speech? By limits, I refer specifically to the signals that practicing Soviet historians might have read about forbidden topics as they try to make their cautious way through the mine-fields of Soviet historical research. Perhaps the most disappointing aspect of Gorbachev's speech touched on the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact signed in 1939. The General Secretary defended the treaty as an act that guaranteed the physical survival of the Soviet state and one that was comparable in its political wisdom to the 1918 Brest-Litovsk Treaty with the German Imperial Government. Not a word was said about the secret clauses that gave the green light for the Soviet Union's first steps toward the creation of its East European empire, namely the invasions of eastern Poland (described in Soviet books as "the liberation of western Ukraine and Byelorussia"), Romania (whose disputed territory of Bessarabia became the Moldavian Soviet Republic and part of the Ukraine), and the three Baltic states. In not telling the whole truth, Gorbachev misrepresented the pact in a fundamental sense. In a similar way, he distorted the role and ideas of Lev Trotsky and justified Stalin's political career during the 1920s by praising him for safeguarding Leninism and for leading the struggle against the dangerous petty-bourgeois deviations advocated by Trotsky. The overall tone of Gorbachev's discussion of the Party debates during the 1920s suggested a fundamental obstacle that long has loomed over Soviet historical writing, namely that there was and is only one correct interpretation of history at any given

3 Indeed, in early summer 1988 citizens appealed to the current leaders to authorize publication of Khrushchev's "secret speech" to demonstrate the authenticity of the changes underway.

4 For the complete text of Gorbachev's speech, see the brochure, *October and Perestroika* (Moscow, 1987).

5 For more on the "Burdzhakov controversy," see Nancy Heer, *Politics and History in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1971) 69-95; Aleksandr Nekrich, *Otreshis' ot strakha: Vospominaniia istorika* (London, 1979), pp. 143-147. See also the recent English translation by Donald J. Raleigh of Burdzhakov's once controversial work, *Russia's Second Revolution: The February 1917 Uprising in Petrograd* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1987).



time, a way that is retroactively labeled "Leninist." This dogmatic approach rendered Gorbachev's characterization of the NEP as little more than a political myth at best, and as a fundamental distortion at worst. It was clear from these and other limitations in Gorbachev's major public address on history that although much had changed, and changed rapidly indeed, the political rhetoric of the leadership, and by extension of most historians, remained trapped in static categories of Leninism and political correctness and "deviationism."

At the same time, it would be unfair to stop with Gorbachev's speech as the limit to discussion because the difference between what Gorbachev outlined in his speech, on the one hand, and the public discourse in journals as well as what is being reported from live meetings, on the other hand, already is much larger than was the distance between Khrushchev's analogous address and the historical discussions of the late 1950s and early 1960s. The discussions of the past are occurring with much greater autonomy from the pronouncements of the political leadership, and their dynamism and open-endedness suggest that Gorbachev does not have a predetermined plan according to which the debates are being conducted. Historians and those who reflect on historical themes are not merely waiting for signals from above, but are shaping the reform agenda themselves by posing questions not yet raised in official Party forums. Already since the November speech, Bukharin has been formally rehabilitated to Party membership, his works are beginning to be discussed, and his legacy is evaluated in a far more balanced fashion than has been the case since the 1920s.<sup>6</sup> In fact, Bukharinism has become the dominant reformist doctrine in the current political discourse. During the spring of 1988, first the Right Oppositionists and then leading members of the Left Opposition (Zinoviev, Kamenev, Radek, and Piatakov) were cleared of criminal charges by the Supreme Court commission appointed to review the sentences passed during the 1930s. Trotsky's portrait appeared in a Leningrad historical museum and live footage of him is part of a new film released for Soviet television titled, *More Light (Bol'she sveta)*.<sup>7</sup> Historians and publicists have even written on sensitive foreign policy issues, probably the least vulnerable area to serious reconsideration because of the potential diplomatic repercussions of many "blank spots." A joint Soviet-Polish team of historians is at work on the often painful history of Soviet-Polish relations, including the

Katyn massacre of Polish officers during World War II. Stalin's biographer Volkogonov denounced the friendship and border treaty signed with Germany on September 28, 1939 as immoral and devoid of Communist principles.<sup>8</sup> Finally, in a very dramatic reversal of official pronouncements, the secret protocols to the treaty were published first in an Estonian newspaper in July and then in *Sovetskaia Rossiia* in August 1988.

## Professional Historians Join the Struggle

During 1987 the major accomplishments of reformist historians were to begin to fill in the "blank spots" in the historical record. Some senior historians played important roles, primarily in non-historical journals. Among them the most outspoken have been Pavel Volobuev on 1917, Vasilii Polikarpov on the Civil War, Viktor Danilov on collectivization, Aleksandr Samsonov on World War II, and Iuryi Afanas'ev on virtually everything. Additionally, Samsonov has brought to the greater reading public the legacy of the late Soviet writer Konstantin Simonov, whose reminiscences, unpublished articles, and diaries shed important light on popular attitudes toward Stalin at various periods.<sup>9</sup> The careers of all these men suffered after the 1960s when Stalin-era orthodoxies were reimposed following the relatively freer years under Khrushchev.

Until the end of 1987 all this considerable activity had not amounted to a new historiography nor, for that matter, any revelations about the past that were news to Western historians. What was important, however, was the way in which many historians were beginning to talk about the past and about how it should be written and taught. The most popular forums were the "round-table discussions" that are frequently arranged by the editorial boards of journals or convened at institutes or universities. At many of these discussions, historians have gone far beyond the topics and attitudes toward history that Gorbachev would seem to have circumscribed in his address. A comparison of two roundtable discussions separated by little more than half a year dramatically reveals the important changes taking place in the rhetoric and attitudes of Soviet historians. The first discussion occurred in the summer of 1987 at a round table hosted, ironically, by the editors of *Kommunist*, the Party ideological journal.<sup>10</sup> The most outspoken discussants were Sam-

6 In June Stephen Cohen announced that he had signed a contract with Progress Publishers to release a Russian-language version of his biography, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution* (Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1973). See also the interview of Cohen and Shatrov in *Moscow News* (June 14, 1987).

7 For more on the fate of the historical Trotsky, see Thomas Sherlock, "Politics and History under Gorbachev," *Problems of Communism* (May-August 1988), pp. 16-42.

8 See *Pravda* (June 20, 1988); see also the remarkable articles on Soviet foreign policy by Viacheslav Dashichev in *Literaturnaia gazeta* (May 18, 1988); *Komsomol'skaia pravda* (June 19, 1988).

9 Samsonov has written a book of memoirs about the Soviet historical profession in the post-Stalin period that is scheduled for release this year, *Pamiat' minuvshogo: sobytiia, liudi, istoriia*. See also his postscript, "Glavnoe v istorii pravda," to Simonov's article "Uroki istorii i dolg pisatel'ia: Zametki literatora," in *Nauka i zhizn'* (June 1987).

10 "Osnovnye etapy razvitiia sovetskogo obshchestva: kruglyi stol zhurnala 'Kommunist'," *Kommunist* (August 1987), No. 12.



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sonov and an historian of the peasantry in the 1920s, Vladimir Kozlov.<sup>11</sup> Kozlov chose the topic of periodization, or the division of the past into distinct periods, to raise the larger questions of alternatives and the inadequacies of history written exclusively from the perspective of the political victor, what has been called "Whig history" in the West.<sup>12</sup> Samsonov in turn denounced the widespread practice of collegial or collective monograph writing as an intrinsically conservative process that exerts tremendous pressures on historians to conform. Such conformism creates a false impression that there can only be one point of view on any topic. Finally, he proposed that there no longer be any "forbidden zones" for historians. Another discussant charged Kozlov with "a nihilistic attitude toward periodization," and other panelists contested Samsonov's ideas. Still, even some of the historians who had been known for their rather conservative stances in the past called for new ways of writing history. Above all, they conceded that historians must reintroduce individuals to history, and not only names but "the living human being with his psychology, interests, hopes and concerns, prejudices and mistakes."

The second roundtable discussion<sup>13</sup> was hosted by the editors of *Moscow News* in response to the appearance of Mikhail Shatrov's play, *Forward, Forward, Forward!* Most of the historians defended Shatrov's plays, even while disagreeing in part with Shatrov's depiction of historical events and persons. Several expressed concern, however, about some aspects of the "democratization" of history in newspapers and magazines. In particular, the widespread popularity of pot-boiler historical fiction has alarmed reformist historians. Iurii Poliakov pointed to the growing audience for the novels of Valentin Pikul' as a sign of the ill health of professional history writing. Pikul' has written several sensational novels that are set in the Imperial Russian past, most notably *Favorit* about Catherine the Great's palace favorites and *Agoniia* about Rasputin and the fall of the Romanovs (adapted for the screen by Elem Klimov and shown in the United States as *Rasputin*). Poliakov charged that the novels have "little artistic value" and "are not really historical. But we should take account of the tremendous interest in Pikul's novels, which indicates that historians have failed in something; they have ignored the human factor in history." Other historians at the roundtable confessed that professional history writing had fallen into such disrepute among the reading public that perhaps it was not a bad thing that novelists, playwrights and journalists were

reviving interest in historical topics and that even professional historians should become journalists in the short run to restore some credibility to their discipline. Vitalii Lelchuk lamented that "we still hold the old mistaken view that historians are those who are professionally certified as such. But for long years many such people were made to practice anything but history."

Lelchuk repeated Kozlov's earlier call to repudiate monocausal, overly determinist models of history. "From my point of view," Lelchuk argued, "it is the historian's duty to research unrealized alternatives. In our experience such research is almost totally absent." As in the earlier roundtable, the issue of alternatives to the one previously accepted path of development came to the fore as one of the most burning topics of discussion, only this time the proposal met with little disagreement. Elsewhere, discussants have called for breaking with the Eurocentrism of Soviet historians who often desperately try to fit Russia's development into a European model. They frequently allude to a controversial article by Igor' Kliamkin in *Novyi mir* entitled "Which Road Leads to the Temple?"<sup>14</sup> They have proposed a more balanced consideration of the Stolypin reforms, the Bukharinist alternative to Stalin, and the Chaianov model of agricultural development, to list only the most prominent ones mentioned to date.

Above all else, the historians demanded greater tolerance for dissenting opinions, or pluralism without calling it by that name. Lelchuk raised the delicate issue of Lenin's authority and, by extension, the issue of scholarly authority in general.<sup>15</sup> Genrikh Ioffe defended an equally bold call for a break with past practices. "When a historian or an author is denied the right to a hypothesis, a supposition, science cannot develop. There already was a time when we showed, or rather were made to show, complete unanimity of views." So what if occasionally a historian is proven later to have advocated an unpersuasive thesis? "There is only one way to end the mania for uniform thinking, to teach people to come up with their own views and assessments — to give them a chance to independently figure out what is what," Ioffe concluded. All these declarations amount to nothing less than a manifesto for a new Soviet Age of Enlightenment. In the spirit of this neo-Kantian call for enlightenment, the success of *perestroika* is tied to the development of individual initiative and the capacity for individuals to reflect about their environment without paternalistic or bureaucratic tutelage. The calls are being made in

11 Kozlov is now an important deputy at the Central Party Archives, Institute of Marxism-Leninism.

12 See Stephen Cohen, "Sovietology as a Vocation," in his *Rethinking the Soviet Experience: Politics and History Since 1917* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), for a discussion of the dangers of Whig history in the context of Western schools of interpretation in Soviet studies.

13 *Moscow News* No. 10 (March 1988), p. 12. Several other roundtable discussions occurred in the last half of 1987, but the themes discussed varied little from one to another. See especially one reported in *Voprosy istorii KPSS* (July, 1987) 7: 137-152. The participants included Afanas'ev, Volobuev, and Danilov.

14 Igor' Kliamkin, "Kakaia ulitsa vedet k khramu?" *Novyi mir*, No. 11, 1987. The title comes from one of the last lines of dialogue in Abuladze's film *Repentance*. Kliamkin sympathetically explores the alternative visions of Russia's development of conservative and anti-Soviet writers, including the conservative editor Katkov, the *Smenavekhovtsy*, Trotsky, the Menshevik Dan, and others.

15 Another recent article, "Istoki" by Vasilii Seliunin, has provoked even more far-reaching considerations of alternatives by suggesting that Lenin and Leninism were responsible for much of the tragedy of Soviet history; see *Novyi mir* No. 5 (1988): 162-189.



the name of the current reform programs on the grounds that knowledge of the past is necessary to evaluate the roots of present dilemmas and to propose alternatives for future change.

To set in motion the enlightenment process, historians first of all have to regain some measure of professional self-respect by rebuilding their own institutions and rethinking their discipline. Viktor Danilov argued that the long tyranny of what he calls the "Brezhnev-Trapeznikov generation" (Sergei Trapeznikov was a historian of "Leninism and the agrarian question" and a powerful policymaker for the social sciences in the Party's Central Committee under Brezhnev<sup>16</sup>) placed a whole generation of dogmatic hacks on the editorial boards of all major historical journals and in historical institutes and university history departments. The students of this senior generation now form a grey middle-aged cohort that has chased nearly all genuinely talented young scholars from history, but especially from the fields of Soviet and Party history.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the older generations already have demonstrated their superb skills of masking their conservative stances by using the new rhetoric of the Gorbachev era without changing their mode of operating. In November 1987 the conservative historians were able to win most of the elections to important posts as heads of sectors in the historical institutes. Danilov's election to the sector of socialist agriculture was an almost unique triumph for the reformist forces. In fact, Danilov's election is probably the closest the historians came in 1987 to a version of the "revolutions" in the Union of Cinematographers that brought Elem Klimov to power and in the theatrical union, where the All-Russian Theatrical Society was disbanded and replaced by a Union of Theater Workers. Even after Danilov's election, opposition to him remained strong. Although he was able to have his articles printed in *Literaturnaia gazeta* and *Pravda*, they were heavily edited without his permission. Upon his election, he announced that the sector on socialist agriculture would devote all its energies to studying collectivization; all other topics temporarily would move to the back burner.<sup>18</sup>

## Reform and Professionalism

In early 1988 the reformists gained the upper hand in several important institutions. When a new editor, Akhmed

Iskenderov, assumed his responsibilities for the January issue of the leading history journal, *Voprosy istorii*, the hopeful beginnings finally moved into the institutions of the historical profession itself.<sup>19</sup> Once *Voprosy istorii* organized volatile discussions and began to change its professional profile, other journals, especially *Istoriia SSSR*, also followed suit. By now a consensus for a reformist agenda among historians has emerged in rather clear outlines. First, historians are asserting for themselves a prominent role in reformist politics at the national level. They are promising the Gorbachev leadership and the rest of the critically thinking intelligentsia that they can help uplift Soviet society from its moral and spiritual stagnation and instill a new civic consciousness in their countrymen. They have pledged to build institutional safeguards and to disseminate attitudes among the population to prevent the return of a new Brezhnev era of stagnation, let alone a Stalinist period of repression. Second, they realize that in order to make their contribution, they need to raise the prestige of the historical profession in the eyes of society. To do so they must raise professional standards, most importantly by winning for themselves substantial professional autonomy and the power to govern their own affairs without constant and stifling political intervention from outside the profession.

What are historians offering society in the era of reforms? They are claiming a place for themselves, in the tradition of the great historians of the 19th and early 20th centuries, as enlightened guides for public discussions of Soviet domestic and international policy.<sup>20</sup> They promise to help society and the political elite to consider alternative solutions to the nation's pressing problems by illuminating the historical roots of the contemporary political and social order. Not surprisingly, one issue of particular concern to historians in recent months has been the "national question." In a multinational state, such as the Russian Empire was and the Soviet Union is today, reformist historians hope that more honest appraisals of past relations among diverse nationalities will help local and national leaders to identify the sources of inter-ethnic tensions and to preserve some measure of harmony in Soviet society during the difficult years ahead. They stress the need for studies of the formation of the Russian Empire, the foreign relations of the

16 For more on Trapeznikov, see Heer, p. 52; and Nekrich, pp. 217-240, 257-269.

17 For a thorough discussion of recent professional trends in Soviet history, see an article by Academician S. L. Tikhvinskii, "Nekotorye voprosy raboty sovetskikh istorikov," *Voprosy istorii* 1986, No. 12. The article is based on Tikhvinskii's speech to the General Meeting of the History Section of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR on October 21, 1986.

18 A further indication of the difficulties faced by a reformist historian is Danilov's recent lecture tour of the country to combat a campaign by local party leaders and historians to portray collectivization as the work of the Jews, Trotsky and Kaganovich. Stalin, on the other hand is portrayed by these speakers as the savior of the Russian peasantry because he allegedly stopped the worst excesses of the collectivization drive. These reports are based on the author's interview with Danilov in September 1987 and June 1988 and on conversations with Teodor Shanin and Moshe Lewin.

19 For a virtual manifesto of the reform-minded historians as of early 1988, see Iskenderov's inaugural editorial, "Perestroika i zadachi zhurnala *Voprosy istorii*," No. 2, *Voprosy istorii*, 1988, pp. 3-10. In January Iskenderov convened a roundtable discussion at the editorial offices of *Voprosy istorii*. Much of the proceeding discussion is based on Iskenderov's inaugural lecture and the January meeting, whose participants included Danilov, Kim, Bolkhovitinov, Volobuev, Novosel'tsev, Poliakov, Anisimov, Froianov, Shelestov, Alekseev, Shatsillo, Tiurin, Klokova, Dolutskii, Nazarov, Startsev, and Pavlenko. The discussion is reported in No. 3, 1988, *Voprosy istorii*, pp. 3-57.

20 In what appears at least in part as an attempt to recapture some of the prestige of their prerevolutionary predecessors, historians have persuaded publishing houses to release new editions of the old classics, including Kliuchevskii, Solov'ev, Karamzin, Pavlov-Silvanskii, Platonov, and Presniakov.



Empire and the nature of Russian imperialism (including a critique of the Short Course apology for Russian imperialism), the roots of national and ethnic consciousness, and the history of religions. It is clear that this has been a topic of concern to many historians for some time and one that has not been given an airing; the recent demonstrations of national and ethnic grievances in the Caucasus and Baltic areas, the celebration of the millennium of Orthodox Christianity and the reported religious revival among Russians, and the concern over an Islamic revival have given added urgency to these concerns.<sup>21</sup>

The issue of alternatives is very closely related to the politics of the multinational state because the reformist historians have declared another of their goals to be the encouragement of increased pluralism in Soviet political culture and the toleration of points of view previously considered to be anathema.<sup>22</sup> Many historians have called openly for a repudiation of the orthodox views of Stalin's 1938 *Short Course (History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union)* and his 1952 *Economic Problems of Socialism*; some have even subjected Lenin's legacy to painful scrutiny. To combat dogmatic thinking, historians and publicists have presented favorable accounts of non-Soviet and anti-Soviet critiques, including prerevolutionary Russian liberals and conservatives, Mensheviks and European Social-Democrats, and even Trotsky.<sup>23</sup> At a roundtable on Western historians of Russia, the panelists significantly dropped the traditional epithet of "bourgeois historians" for a more neutral "non-Marxist historians" and also avoided the extremely defensive tone that once characterized Soviet historians who specialized in combating Western distortions and misperceptions of the history of the USSR.<sup>24</sup> The Institutes of World History and The History of the USSR have scheduled a large conference for October 1989 devoted to the teaching of Russian and Soviet history abroad and have begun to invite large numbers of foreign scholars to participate. Conference organizer Aleksandr Chubarian lamented, "If I can speak absolutely frankly, we have a lot to learn from Western historians about our own past."<sup>25</sup> The most dramatic "rapprochement" along these lines was a review by Danilov of the Western literature on the famine of 1932-33, in which the author berates Soviet historians for

ignoring this controversial topic and asserts that "it is absolutely obvious that the experience and research results conducted by our colleagues and our opponents abroad must be taken into account."<sup>26</sup>

As historians press their claims for a prominent role in guiding enlightened debate and encouraging a more pluralist political culture, they have focused their attention on effective means to influence popular attitudes and to "democratize" Soviet society's historical consciousness. The teaching of history in schools and universities has emerged as a battleground for conservative and reformist

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forces. At the end of the 1988 school year the national teachers' newspaper *Uchitel'skaia gazeta* announced that final examinations in Russian and Soviet history were cancelled because of the unsatisfactory state of available textbooks. In place of the traditional written exams, students were to be quizzed orally on aspects of the current reform program. In the meantime, all textbooks are being rewritten according to guidelines which themselves are the subject of constant debate and revision. In July 1987 the Ministry of Higher and Specialized Secondary Education announced a competition for a new textbook on the history of the Communist Party. At a Moscow seminar, Nikolai Maslov, head of the Department of the History of the CPSU at the Academy of Social Sciences attached to the Central Committee of the CPSU, suggested guidelines to combat the four dogmas that have shaped Party histories since the Short Course appeared in 1938.<sup>27</sup>

In an even more far-reaching move, several professional historians are trying to encourage and counsel the widespread popular movement that is engaged in writing local and regional histories (*kraevedenie*). For example, the medievalist Sigurd Shmidt has drafted guidelines to help local enthusiasts in collecting materials, conducting interviews among long-time inhabitants, and organizing regional history teams. As a measure to rekindle a love for the past

21 See an interview with L. Drobizheva and Iu. Poliakov on the topic of ethnic and national politics, *Izvestiia* (March 22, 1988), p. 3.

22 The historian Volobuev has written a book that speaks directly to the theme of alternatives for social development, *Vybor putei obshchestvennogo razvitiia: teoriia, istoriia, sovremennost'* (Moscow, 1987).

23 See Kliamkin and Seliunin, cited earlier. Otto Latsis, the deputy editor of *Kommunist*, argues that a "civic rehabilitation" of Trotsky is very likely in the near future. See the interview by R. Guseinov and A. Drozdov in *Komsomol'skaia pravda* (June 28, 1988). Roy Medvedev, the dissident historian and author of a major anti-Stalinist work *Let History Judge*, has been interviewed and evaluated favorably in *Komsomol'skaia pravda* (June 12, 1988), p. 1; and *Sobesednik* 18 (April 1988): 12-13.

24 See "Sovremennaiia nemarksistskaia istoriografiia i sovetskaia istoricheskaia nauka," No. 1; and A. N. Sakharov, "Istoriia Sovetskogo Soiuzia pod perom konservativnykh sovetologov 80-kh godov," No. 2, *Istoriia SSSR*, 1988. Iskenderov called for a new civility in discussions and the dropping of hostile labels and slurs. An article on the October Revolution by the American historian Alexander Rabinowitch was published without any commentary in *Voprosy istorii* 5 (1988): 14-27.

25 In addition to the contract Stephen Cohen signed to publish his biography of Bukharin, translators are at work on a translation of Sheila Fitzpatrick's *The Commissariat of Enlightenment* (London and New York, 1970).

26 V. P. Danilov, "Diskussii v zapadnoi presse o golode 1932-33 gg. i 'demograficheskoi katastrofe' 30-40-kh godov v SSSR," *Voprosy istorii*, No. 3, 1988, pp. 116-121. Danilov ends with a note of thanks to Roberts Davies and Stephen Wheatcroft for their contributions to this important discussion.

27 Maslov repudiated the following dogmas: 1) that of the non-conflicting development of the Party; 2) that any historical personality who had made any sort of political error was a primordial opponent of Leninism and Socialism; 3) that the leading role of the Party was growing steadily, nearly automatically, all the time; and 4) that all the Party documents are one hundred percent true. See Wheatcroft, "Unleashing," pp. 131-132.



among a wider audience and to help citizens learn about the past firsthand, historians have recommended the publication of primary documents and archival materials in large annotated editions. Finally, several of the participants in the recent discussions have proposed that historians make themselves more available to the mass media, that they organize joint roundtables with writers and television reporters, and that they themselves produce television programs on historical topics of current interest. In an attempt to inject their expertise and reformist agenda into the public forum, historians frequently answer letters of subscribers to popular journals after the appearance of a particularly controversial or sensational article.

For all their ambitious enlightenment aims, however, historians are vexed about the ominous gap that separates the widespread enthusiastic popular interest in national history from the nearly universally low prestige of their profession. Iskenderov charged that one of the major reasons for the low status of professional historians and the lack of popular interest in their work is the clichéd, grey, and impersonal officialese in which most scholars persist in writing. He proposed that histories convey to readers a sense of the epoch they are reading about and a personal relationship to the events, facts and individuals. Otherwise, the field of history is left to the mass media and writers of historical fiction. Again, the most frequently mentioned *bête-noire* for participants in the recent discussions is the writer Pikul'. He has been criticized most forcefully by Evgenii Anisimov, but his pernicious influence has been decried by dozens of professional historians, who have even recommended opening the pages of historical journals to critical discussions of recent fictional works on historical topics.<sup>28</sup> Danilov has warned that much of the fictional literature has a tendency to idealize the past, especially the pre-revolutionary history of Russia. He attributes this nostalgic reading of the past to a widespread dissatisfaction with the present, but cautions that such idealizations are dangerous if history is to play any role in a reevaluation of the present. Other historians have recommended that their colleagues be more responsive to popular interests. For example, historians should write articles or brochures on the Freemasons and Khrushchev, two topics that have captured the interests of large sectors of the reading public.

Once the historians have won back a popular audience for their work in the short run, they will have to hold on to that audience by restoring high professional standards for the long term. Their primary goal in the area of professional restructuring is greater autonomy from the Party and other outside political interference. S. V. Tiutiukhin was among the first historians to call for the formation of a national

Society of Historians on the model of other professions who have recently organized themselves to restructure their working environments.<sup>29</sup> They demand greater, more unlimited access to archives<sup>30</sup> and more opportunities to participate in international congresses and to maintain close ties with foreign scholars in their fields of specialization. To break the conservatives' monopoly, reformists need to organize elections at institutes, departments, and editorial boards. At least Iskenderov has promised that he will open the pages of his journal to young historians on a regular basis.

Even little changes herald the new strivings among the reformists. The book review sections in professional journals have expanded considerably with an innovation that signals the emerging pluralism. One issue frequently features more than one review of the same book, or else a succeeding issue contains a second review by a different author. Iskenderov and several other historians appealed for less timidity in reviewing works and decried the practice of historians "organizing" reviews of their own works by friendly colleagues to avoid disagreeable criticism. In the past, historians were especially hesitant to criticize the work of senior colleagues; consequently, such major multi-volume series as *The History of the Second World War 1939-1945* have gone without "fundamental and objective analysis in the scholarly press." Reformist beginnings can be sustained only if the old strictures of censorship are significantly reduced and if historians gain confidence that the changes will be long-lasting.

Even if all goes the way the reformists hope it will, their agenda contains within itself certain tensions that could augur ill for the future. First, historians are asking for a greater political role for themselves at the same time they are demanding a new social contract with the Party leadership which entails minimal state intervention in an educational system that relies entirely on the beneficence of central budgetary planners. Russia experienced a brief period of alternatives to the state educational system at the end of the Romanov period with privately financed universities and courses, but during most of the Imperial period all institutions of higher learning formed part of the state bureaucracy. Both historians and political leaders have no model to turn to as they try to restructure their relations with one another. Soviet educational institutions already have been ordered to shift to self-financing for some of their needs. How the Academy will fare in the face of further moves away from central financing is unclear and troubling for many. Second, professional historians are encouraging greater public participation in the historical enterprise, an inclusivist goal, at the same time they are hoping to raise professional standards

28 Recently the central military-historical journal published an interview with Pikul', but the article was highly laudatory of Pikul's efforts to instill pride in the military and patriotic glories of Russia's past. See *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal* 1 (1988): 60-65. Incidentally, *perestroika* seems not to have reached this journal, which this year continued to include a rubric on the struggle against "bourgeois falsifiers."

29 See Tiutiukhin's appeal in *Izvestiia* (May 3, 1987).

30 For announcements about the opening of extensive archival holdings to Soviet historians, see *Izvestiia* (May 22, 1987; July 17, 1988). For a report on the persistent efforts of archivists to place obstacles in the way of historians, see the article by V. Molchanov, *Pravda* (June 1, 1988), p. 4.



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by purging their ranks of ideologues and time-servers, a markedly exclusivist aim. Already, enraged citizens are calling for professional historians to abandon their elitist attitudes and display some humility, especially when the professionals have such a poor record of performance as it is. And, not surprisingly, reformist historians have been accused of trying to establish a new orthodoxy.

Whether historians succeed in resolving some of these potential contradictions, of course, does not depend entirely on them, and in an important sense, the dilemmas of historians reflect the dilemmas of the Gorbachev program on a smaller scale. Gorbachev too is gambling on scaling back the bureaucracy and allowing a new managerial and entrepreneurial class to jolt the economy out of its doldrums, at the same time that — largely to restore popular faith in government — he invites society to participate in its own government through the mechanisms of democratization. The General Secretary is pursuing both exclusionary and inclusionary policies that already have created a number of political headaches.

Similarly, professional historians confront pressures from both below, where popular interest in historical topics has been answered by fictional accounts and the mass media, and from above, where the current leadership wages its reform campaigns with constant allusions to the Soviet and Russian past. Historians want a role in the restructuring of society's values and attitudes, but they have had to face the unpleasant reality of their low prestige in society. They have begun to make great changes in their own organizations and in their public statements. Now, if they wish truly to improve their position, they must return to the archives, pull out their notepads, and write new histories.

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